

# Non-Violent Communication and Marital Relationship: Efficacy of ‘Emotion-Focused Couples’ Communication Program Among Filipino Couples

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**Abstract** Non-Violent Communication (NVC), developed by Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg, fosters intra- and interpersonal relationship through empathetic and compassionate communication. It has been used and proven effective in a variety of settings like schools, health care centers, jails, and in restorative and rehabilitative institutions. However, the use of NVC in the field of marital relationship is found to be relatively few. The present study aimed at investigating the efficacy of the intervention program, Emotion-Focused Couples’ Communication Program (EFCCP) in a Filipino setting. EFCCP which is an intervention program developed by the researchers based on the constructs of NVC has already been proven to be effective in a previous study involving couples in an Indian setting. This present study was undertaken to investigate the efficacy of the program’s shortened version in the Filipino setting and to test whether the program is culturally suited for Filipino married couples. Relational Communication Scale and Locke–Wallace Marital Adjustment Test were used to measure the level of communication and marital satisfaction among the couples. The EFCCP-Shortened Version was administered to a group of 12 couples for a period of 3 weeks, and the results revealed a significant difference in the level of couples’ communication and marital satisfaction among the participants. These results provided ample indications to the efficacy of the EFCCP-Shortened Version in enhancing communication and enriching marriage quality among couples across diverse settings.

**Keywords** Non-Violent Communication · Marital relationship · Couples’ communication · Marital satisfaction · Filipino couples

## Introduction

Family is considered as the basic unit of the society, the single most important agent of shaping the individual human person. It is also considered as the major source of security, the *safe haven* against perceived threats outside (Anna, 2003). It can be broadly described as a unit where two or more individuals are united into a bond in which they constantly interact and communicate mutually for mutual support and benefit (Desai, 1994). As Ritvo (2002) has put it, the family is the platform for human beings to attain psychological development, emotional well-being, acquire self-esteem and self-worth, and establish healthy interpersonal interactions and development among its members. Thus, family plays an important role in creating a sense of security and of belongingness in the minds of its members, providing them feelings of support and comfort (Anna, 2003).

Family relations are established basically in two ways: (1) through birth or adoption and (2) through marriage, which according to Strong, DeVault, and Cohen (2011) is a legally approved contract between two grown-up individuals and is known as conjugal relationship. Marriage and family are very closely connected in forming and shaping individuals and society, and for this reason, marriage is considered as the most important institution in all cultures and societies across the world (Imhonde, Aluede, & Ifunanyachukwu, 2008; Myers, Madathil, & Tingle, 2005). Waite, Luo, and Lewin (2009) speak of marriage as a promise two people make in public that has social

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acceptance, and thus, marriage is an institution which is attested by law, supported by communities, and recognized by religions. Therefore, unlike other forms of relationships, marriage is esteemed and acknowledged in all cultures. In short, marriage and family substantially differ in numerous ways from other forms of human relations and associations in consideration of the duration and intensity of the relationship, the roles and functions the members perform, and the like (Ritvo, 2002).

According to the adult attachment theory, one of the major reasons why people enter into a marital relationship is to look for an attachment figure, someone to whom they are emotionally close and in the presence of whom they feel secure (Bowlby, 1973; Raeisipoor, Fallahchai, & Zarei, 2012). This theory suggests that marriage is an institution from which people derive fulfillment of their attachment needs and a sense of security. Marriage thus becomes a unique institution which effectively responds to this need of the people. It acts as a source of individual happiness that helps them find fulfillment and meaning in their life (Azeez, 2013). People therefore enter this relationship seeking a satisfying and content way of life (Rhodes, Stanley, & Markman, 2009).

There have been a number of researches which have posited that an affectionate relationship with an intimate partner propels psychological and physical well-being and satisfaction of the partners (Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, & Nitzberg, 2005). According to Raeisipoor et al. (2012), marital bond is one of the most fundamental human relationships because it not only provides love and sexual joy to the parties involved and enhances a sense of peace and contentment, but also ensures security for them from loneliness. For this reason, marriage becomes an essential element of human society where the intimate partners care for one another and feel affectionate toward their partner, thus creating a sense of belongingness in them (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005; Rokach, & Philibert-Lignieres, 2015). Marriage is a bond that provides the partners protection against emotional insecurities and paves the foundation for forming families and future generation (Soltani, Molazadeh, Mahmoodi, & Hosseini, 2013). A satisfying marriage therefore facilitates the attainment of the full actualization of human potentialities (Whisman, Snyder, & Beach, 2009). According to Wunderer and Schneewind (2008), marriage is a highly significant form of human relationship, especially in terms of attachment and intimacy as it primarily aims at and leads to higher levels of physical and psychological well-being. It is instrumental in enhancing personal well-being to higher levels (Khajeh, Goodarzi, & Soleimani, 2014).

But our modern society is threatened with a fast growing rate of divorce and separation of the married partners leading to distress and psych-ache, not just to the partners

but also to those who are closely related to them. Instead of ensuring human happiness and well-being, marriage has itself become a source of great distress and dissatisfaction among the partners in an alarming degree (Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007). A number of studies in modern times show that relationship hazards and marital disharmony have substantially contributed toward dysfunction and distress among couples and families (Sandhya, 2009). Poor marital adjustment and unhealthy patterns of interaction have an adverse effect on the mental and physical health of the couples, preventing them from experiencing physiological and psychological well-being, which is one of the original intents of marriage (Finchem & Beach, 2010).

The emergence of a vast variety of mental sickness (Goldfarb, Trudel, Boyer, & Preville, 2007), as well as physiological discomfort and illness (Pihet, Bodenmann, Cina, Widmer, & Shantinath, 2007), is largely attributed to marital distress. Moreover, the deprivation of emotional security and the absence of an attachment figure often push persons into neurobiological imbalances and causes a dip in the so-called cuddle hormone 'oxytocin,' which plays a vital role in the immunity system (Taylor et al., 2000).

Communication helps couples to enhance and strengthen their love relationship; it helps them to know each other more deeply. This leads to better understanding of and respect and regard for the partner (Bodenmann, Bradbury, & Pihet, 2009). A prominent reason among many, why couples experience disconnectedness and distress in the marital relationship is a faulty and ineffective communication (Troy, 2000). While a healthy communication nurtures human relationship, a faulty and unhealthy communication pattern leads couples to disconnect from one another and causes a dip in the level of marital satisfaction (Rosenberg, 2003).

### Marriage and Family in the Philippines

In the Philippines, marriage as a social institution and family as the basic unit of the society are highly regarded and strongly revered (Gultiano, Hindin, Upadhyay, & Armechin, 2009). As inscribed in the Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines (1987), the Filipino family is traditionally renowned for its great solidarity and stability. The constitution states, 'The state recognizes the Filipino family as the foundation of the nation. Accordingly, it shall strengthen its solidarity and actively promote its total development.' As observed by Medina (2001), the Filipino community is known for its strong family ties in terms of mutual love, care, and support the members render to one another. Moreover, the family has an all-encompassing influence over every aspect of a Filipino's life. Medina further says that the whole of Filipino society revolves

around its prime unit, i.e., family. Marriages in the Philippines usually take place either as a legal contract attested by the Church or recognized by the civil law, or as co-living of the partners (Gultiano et al., 2009). The bond of marriage, both as a legal contract and as a consensual union, is viewed as permanent and sacred (Xenos & Kabamalan, 2007). Medina (2015) observes that marriage in the Philippines not only unites two individuals, but also brings together two families and communities. Thus, as Xenos and Kabamalan (2007) have posited, marriage among Filipinos is more of a family alliance that ensures the stability of the institution and the upward mobility of the family.

But this sacredness and stability are being challenged by the developments of the recent years. Though the Philippines still remains the only country, other than the Vatican City, where divorce is not legal (Emery, 2013), modern Filipino family undergoes various challenges and transitions. In spite of a strong opposition from the part of the major religion of the Philippines, the Catholic Church which holds that divorce is immoral and it would mar the social fabric of the country; there are a growing number of spouses approaching the family courts in the country for legal separation and annulment of marriage (Gloria, 2007). The recent demographic surveys show an alarmingly increasing number of Filipino couples seeking to dissolve their marital union, either legally or informally (Abalos, 2017). Compared to the yester decades, there are evidences of greater number of Filipino couples who have had their marital bond dissolved (Abalos, 2011; Emery, 2013).

According to the data released by the National Statistical Office (2009) from the 'Philippines Demographic and Health survey, 2008,' the number of annulment cases has gone up by over 58% in a span of just 7 years. The figure appears to be disturbing considering that in 2001 there were only 4520 cases filed, while in 2007 it reached a peak of 7753 cases almost doubling the figure of 2001. In Metro Manila itself, as many as 2548 cases were filed in the first 6 months of 2007. Additionally, as per the recently released information from the 'Office of the Solicitor General (OSG),' the number of annulment of marriage and the demand for making divorce legal have gone up by 40% toward the end of 2016 in Metro Manila in comparison with the yester years.

All these facts and figures point to one reality—that the traditionally revered family unity and the sacredness of the institution of marriage are being threatened in the Philippines (Aurea, 2011). Apparently, the world is witnessing an ever increasing number of marital disruptions, conflicts, violence and divorce, and the Filipino society is not immune to this growing menace; the country is facing a scenario of broken families and single parenthood, which seem to outnumber intact families at a very rapid pace and

ratio (Abalos, 2017). This scenario calls for urgent and effective steps to stem the rot.

Many reasons are cited for the rapid growth of separation and dissolution of marital relationship among Filipinos. Among them are: (1) migration to other nations and geographical regions in search of job and better prospects, (2) many married men and women working in 'call centers' at odd hours necessitating physical absence from the partner, and (3) greater financial independence of the partners. Nevertheless, as shown by Chakkyath (2013) in his recent study among the Filipino couples, these factors may not necessarily lead the couple to distress and dissatisfaction in their marriage if they have an effective and healthy communication between them. Regardless of their physical distance and separation, couples can still maintain a healthy and satisfying relationship provided they are ready to engage in constant and effective communication and patient listening. Communication is one such factor that can effectively bridge many a gap caused by various factors that spouses encounter in their marital relationship.

### Non-Violent Communication

Non-Violent Communication (NVC) enables one to relate to oneself and to others in an empathetic manner. It restrains one from judgmental and diagnostic language and ensures better connectedness. This is a versatile approach consisting of principles and techniques of communication that could be applied to any population and against any setting. NVC has been extensively used in the training of teachers, clergymen, health care practitioners, lawyers, police men, parents, individuals, officials, and policy makers in the government sectors (Suarez et al., 2014). It also has been found useful in training the prisoners in the USA and elsewhere (Niebuhr, 2001). There is a series of publications and a growing body of literature and findings that support the applicability and effectiveness of NVC in various contexts and settings (Cox & Dannahy, 2005; Wheeler & Patterson, 2008; Branscomb, 2011). Training programs awarding certificates have taken the principles of NVC far and wide, into various parts of the globe (Rosenberg, 2003).

NVC rests on assumptions that people are, by nature, compassionate and all share the same basic human needs, and seek to get their needs met employing in the process, strategies that they deem right and rewarding. NVC promotes tools and principles that would enhance nonviolent, empathic, and collaborative communication. Thus, it is an alternative communication process to a culture that employs implicitly or explicitly violent and destructive strategies for getting one's needs met. The foundations of NVC are observations, feelings, needs, and requests.

Marshall speaks of connecting to oneself and others with empathy and of giving from the heart (Rosenberg, 2003).

### *Observation*

NVC distinguishes observation from evaluation. It is noticing something with a disinterested and non-judgmental way. The moment one tends to evaluate, the person gets judgmental. An observation is simply factual, while evaluation is always an act of naming and judging (Rosenberg, 2003). A tendency to judge, demand and diagnose, and to think, speak and communicate in terms of 'right and wrong,' 'true or false' often blocks free and open relationship. Evaluation makes people self-defensive fostering misunderstanding, frustration, and violence.

### *Feelings*

NVC, in its second factor, teaches to distinguish our feelings from our thoughts. Often, people fail to identify their own feelings and inner emotions, but instead blurt out what they think is happening. Marshall says identifying one's feelings is taking responsibility for them (Rosenberg, 2003). There is lesser chance of addressing them properly, and the distress will remain longer if feelings are not properly identified or understood.

### *Needs*

The third factor 'need' teaches that the feelings signal or carry in them the unmet needs of the individual. For instance, someone misbehaves with a friend, the friend feels angry at first and sad later on. These feelings of anger and sadness, in fact, are indicators of a more profound and intimate need of the person, particularly the need for acceptance and love, which goes unmet. The anger and sadness are nothing but desperate outer expression of an inner unmet need of the person for love and acceptance. Marshall says that these inner needs are basic and common to all (Rosenberg, 2003). Hence, to identify these feelings and the needs that they carry in them and communicating them in an acceptable, non-demanding and compassionate manner is essential to have a warm, healthy, and compassionate relationship.

### *Requests*

In the discussion of the fourth factor of NVC-Expressing Requests, Marshall suggests that doable requests are to be made, requests that are not demands (Rosenberg, 2003). Demands are always violent, intimidating, and forceful. Equality in relationships cannot be achieved where one demands and the other obliges.

NVC speaks of these four factors as skills that can be learned and developed, and can promote collaboration and enhance connection. They are principles to live by and enable one to avoid judgment, blame, and control and replace them with empathy, respect, and interdependence.

## **Program Description**

Based on the foundations of Non-Violent Communication, the intervention program, 'Emotion-Focused Couples' Communication Program (EFCCP)' was developed to enable the participants to avoid a language that disconnects and to acquire a language which is nonviolent and compassionate. Rosenberg calls it as 'a language of life,' one that facilitates better connection. It begins with cognition, following the first foundation of 'observation,' moves on to emotion and behavioral modification, and then enters into healing of the past hurts and growing in greater appreciation of oneself and the other. This program, EFFCP, has already been proven efficacious with couples from an Indian population (Vazhappilly & Reyes, 2016).

In the present study, an attempt was made to create a shortened version of the original program which had nine modules and necessitated a longer period of time for administering it. The rationale of the shorter version was to address the time constraints that some of the participants may face. This study investigated the EFCCP-Shortened Version's usefulness and efficacy with a Filipino population.

## **Outline of Intervention Program**

See Table 1.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants of the study were twelve couples ( $N = 24$  individuals) from Quezon City, Philippines, aged between 28 and 52 years. Among the 24 individuals, 16 were first-timers and 8 had previous marriages before their present relationship. The participants were composed of 13 college graduates, eight high school graduates and three master's degree holders. Those who met the inclusion criteria were purposively selected based on the scores of the research tools utilized by the researchers. At the beginning of the workshop, the participants signed informed consent forms and the principle of confidentiality was assured. Participation was voluntary, and no remuneration was given for being part of the research.

**Table 1** Emotion-Focused Couples' Communication Program-Shortened Version (EFCCP-SV) modules

Module	Objective
1 Beginning of the journey by entering the inner horizon	<p>Introducing EFCCP, creating awareness on compassion, connectedness, and communication; building rapport</p> <p>Understanding the basic four steps of <i>observation, feelings, needs, and requests</i> as against the cognitive blocks to effective communication expressed in <i>Diagnosis and Demands</i></p> <p>Starting with oneself, to establish self-empathy, self-acceptance, identify and accept one's own deep-seated feelings and needs</p> <p>To overcome self-criticism, self-pity, self-denial, and avoidance</p> <p>To create healthy understanding of the self</p>
2 Toward listening with empathy-with giraffe's ears	<p>To enable active and compassionate listening, devoid of judgments</p> <p>To take criticism jovially</p> <p>To be able to recognize the feelings and needs of the other and to respond to them positively</p> <p>To be able to understand others' behaviors as expressions of their needs</p> <p>To understand and acquire empathy toward oneself and the other</p>
3 With genuineness and honesty	<p>To enable partners to be genuine, truthful in expressing their needs</p> <p>To come out of pretexts and compromises, personas, masks, and inhibitions</p> <p>To be genuinely what one is</p> <p>To express one's feelings and needs openly and without fear or shame</p>
4 Erasing the scars-healing the attachment injuries of the past	<p>To soothe and heal past painful memories</p> <p>To beat the hazards of interpersonal relationships, i.e., anger, guilt, shame depression</p> <p>To reconnect oneself with the partner</p> <p>To avoid <i>should-talks</i></p>
5 Energy tonic: appreciation and gratitude	<p>To familiarize the concept of <i>Ahimsa</i> as the supreme charity expressed in <i>appreciating</i> and <i>thanking</i> the other</p> <p>To show positive effects of mutual appreciation and gratitude as constructs of healthy relationship. To nurture comradeship, belongingness, openness, and honesty</p> <p>To lead to connection, honor, respect, and esteem</p> <p>To facilitate greater acceptance; greater intimacy—through sharing, love, active, and satisfying sex life</p> <p>To learn to give from the heart</p>
6 Stabilizing the change savoring the gain	<p>To launch on to a new horizon of affectionate and romantic relationship</p> <p>To use a new language of loving relationship of understanding and accepting</p> <p>To be able to experience greater attachment fulfillment and emotional security so that distress and discomfort give way to joy and freedom</p> <p>To enable couples to maintain and sustain the growth and change they experienced during the workshop</p> <p>To review and evaluate the entire program</p>

## Measures

### *Relational Communication Scale*

Developed by Burgoon and Hale (1987), the 41-item inventory 'Relational Communication Scale (RCS)' measured the level of communication among marital partners on a scale of 1–7 for every item depending on the agreement/disagreement of the respondent about each statement (e.g., Item. No: 1: 'He/she was intensely involved in our conversation'; Item. No: 11: 'He/she tried

to move the conversation to a deeper level'). A response of seven indicated strong agreement, while a four meant neutral; responses that were lower than four would imply serious concerns existing in the style of couples' mutual communication and their marital relationship. The highest possible overall score was 287 and the lowest 41; accordingly, 'the higher the score, the better the communication.' A previous study conducted found the RCS to have a Cronbach's alpha of 0.97 (Vazhappilly & Reyes, 2016). A Cronbach's alpha of 0.79 was found in the present study.



### *Locke–Wallace Marital Adjustment Test*

The Locke–Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (LWMAT) was one of the first short-measures for the purpose of determining marriage quality of spouses. The 15-item self-scoring scale measured marital satisfaction of the partners. Sample items are: Item# 11: ‘Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?’ and Item# 14: ‘If you had your life to live over, do you think you would: (1) marry the same person, (2) marry a different person, or (3) not marry at all.’ The highest possible score on this scale was 158 with a cut-off score of 100. In an initial study conducted among 236 married couples, LWMAT showed a mean score of 135.9 among the well-adjusted couples and 71.7 for the ill-adjusted ones. It had a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient value of 0.89 in a previous study (Vazhappilly & Reyes, 2016), and in the present study, the LWMAT was found to have a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.84.

### **Design and Procedure**

In the execution of the intervention program, we made use of a pre-experimental design with only an experimental group and no control group. It took pretest as a baseline score and compared it with the posttest score to determine the effect of the independent variable, the EFCCP-Shortened Version. Before the study was conducted, ethical approval was obtained from the Ethical Review Committee of our university. The data-gathering procedure was divided into three phases—i.e., (1) pre-experimental, (2) experimental, and (3) post-experimental.

The pre-experimental phase consisted of contacting the participants, finding, and finalizing the venue and fixture of the intervention. In order to select the participants of the study, we first conducted some surveys and interviews among the parents of students in a school in Quezon City. Those who met the inclusion criteria were selected for the intervention program. Full confidentiality of the proceedings was assured to the participants, and informed consent forms were signed after which the research tools were administered (pretest). The experimental phase began with an overview of the program to the participants. This was followed by the actual implementation of the intervention program. The intervention lasted 3 weeks with two sessions a week each. The intervention program included lectures on key topics, various group activities, audiovisual presentations, handouts, home assignments, and the like. Each module contained a specific theme which addressed a particular issue that the couples faced. There were activities that helped the participants grasp the objectives of the modules and assimilate the learning into their daily life situations. One such activity was ‘keeping a Daily Journal’ of the emotions and responses each participant had during

the day, and this journal is intended to help the participants become more aware of the working of their inner world. Another exercise was to consciously appreciate and thank the partner for any specific good act/attitude the other spouse exhibited during the day. This would enable the participants grow in mutual appreciation and regard, which in turn would work as a tonic in enhancing the bonding between the spouses. The research tools were administered again (posttest) after the administration of the intervention program.

In the post-experimental phase, the pre-intervention and post-intervention scores were evaluated by subjecting it to statistical analysis.

### **Results**

The results of the study revealed that the participants exhibited a notable change in their behavior after the intervention program. Their levels of communication and marital satisfaction as measured by Relational Communication Scale and Locke–Wallace Marriage Adjustment Test show obviously different scores before and after the intervention.

We computed the mean and the standard deviation of the pretest and posttest of the participants as measured by RCS and LWMAT. This computation was accomplished to determine whether there was any difference in the scores of the participants after having undergone the intervention program. These data were further analyzed using *t test* to verify a statistically significant difference. Cohen’s *d* was utilized further to assess the extent of the efficacy of the program.

Table 2 shows the mean score and the standard deviation values of the pretest and posttest of the participants as measured by the two scales. The participants had a low level of communication and lesser degree of marital satisfaction before the intervention of the program as indicated in the low mean scores in both of the scales (RCS = 134.96; LWMAT = 74.45). Likewise at the start of the study, homogeneity of the population is implied as the participants were on the same level as far as the variables in question were concerned. However, the posttest mean scores (RCS = 199.54; LWMAT = 129.95) show a remarkable increase, indicating that the participants had a notable change after the intervention of the program. The difference in the mean score and standard deviation values of the pretest and posttest of the research participants showed a clear elevation in the levels of couples’ communication and marital satisfaction.

Table 2 also presents the result of the test on the difference of mean score between the pretest and posttest of the couples. The *t test* for dependent sample (paired sample

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics and *t* test results for couples' communication and marital satisfaction as measured by RCS and LWMAT

Component	Test	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Relational Communication Scale (RCS)	Pretest	134.95	8.41		
	Posttest	<b>199.54</b>	7.40	−70.30***	23
Locke–Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (LWMAT)	Pretest	74.45	8.91	−85.24***	23
	Posttest	<b>129.95</b>	9.00		

Bold values indicate an increased measure (posttest scores) as against the lower score of the pretest, indicating the change brought about by the intervention program and to its efficacy

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

test) was used to check whether there was a statistically significant change in the mean score after the intervention program. The results indicate that the participants now possess a higher level of communication and greater degree of marital satisfaction. It also states that the intervention program EFCCP-SV had a significant effect on enriching couples' communication ( $t = -70.30$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and on enhancing marital satisfaction ( $t = -85.24$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) among the research participants.

The Cohen's *d* values of the variables, couples' communication and marital satisfaction as measured by the (RCS) and (LWMAT), are presented in Table 3. This was undertaken to interpret the extent of the efficacy of the EFCCP-SV as intervention program.

Table 3 carries clear indications of a large effect of the EFCCP-SV showing a high Cohen's *d* value of 08.15 for RCS and 06.19 for LWMAT, in improving the couples' communication and enhancing marital satisfaction among the participants of the research study.

## Discussion

The goal of the research was to test whether Emotion-Focused Couples' Communication Program (EFCCP) which was based on Non-Violent Communication (NVC) was apt for use in the therapeutic setting of marriage and family in a diverse cultural context. Moreover, the research was undertaken to see whether an abridged form of the program (EFCCP-Shortened Version) was possible and that it worked effectively in promoting couples'

communication and marital satisfaction leading to greater levels of well-being and marriage quality in a Filipino setting.

The research hypothesized that an effective and compassionate communication enhanced marital satisfaction. The modules of the program thus targeted the roadblocks to effective communication based on the four factors of NVC—observation, feelings, needs, and requests. NVC holds that these four foundations, if properly understood and assimilated, can lead to enhance connectedness and promote collaboration. They can be seen as principles to live by than tools to be mastered; they replace judgment, blame, and control with empathy, respect, and interdependence. A sincere and conscious effort to integrate the principles would prove to be a spiritual awareness and a disposition for an ever-deepening compassion for oneself and others.

The result of this study brings out strong implications that NVC is an effective tool and can be employed with reasonable degree of certainty in the setting of marriage and family therapy. The promising results of the study showing high efficacy and the large extent in enhancing couples' communication and marital satisfaction among the participants attest the aforementioned claim of its usefulness and applicability. This is in line with the findings of Gottman, Carrere, Swanson, and Coan (2000), who posit that a healthy interaction pattern in married relationship works like a tonic, ever rejuvenating the marital relationship, for the very relationship itself is dialogical.

The results show that intervention program which is based on NVC elicited statistically significant change in the level of couples' communication and marital satisfaction among the participants. It shows that NVC could effectively be used as a psychotherapeutic tool in helping distressed couples mending their relationships and improving their marriage quality.

The findings of the study effectively substantiate the findings and results of many previous study that an enriching and effective communication leads to greater levels of marital satisfaction (Emmer-Sommer, 2004; Lit-zinger & Gordon, 2005), because communication is a basic skill essential for the relationship to function (Birchler &

**Table 3** Cohen's *d* value of the program on testing the extent of efficacy

Variables	Cohen's <i>d</i> value	Verbal interpretation
RCS	08.15	Large effect
LWMAT	06.19	Large effect

Small effect: 0.2–0.4; medium effect: 0.5–0.7; large effect: 0.8–infinity

False-Stewart, 2006). As a consequence of the improved communication, there is a growth in the social, cognitive, and interactional skills in the couples contributing toward an enhanced personal and dyadic well-being of the couples (Fincham & Beach, 2010). Our study's findings also align with the findings of Johnson and Zuccarini (2010) that people with greater measure of mutual appreciation, affective attachment, and emotions of gratitude and forgiveness are able to cope with trying situations in marriage and grow in greater intimacy in their relationship. The present study convincingly suggests that there has been an increase in the level of couples' communication and marital satisfaction among its participants. This is in line with the findings of Najafi, Soleimani, Ahmadi, Javidi, and Kamkar (2015) which posit effective communication and openness to the emotions of the partner would strengthen the bonds of mutual understanding and acceptance and would foster greater friendship and intimacy among couples. Similarly, Campbell, Butzer, and Wong (2008) found in their study that spouses with more positive patterns of communication experienced greater satisfaction and possessed higher quality of marital relationship.

The efficacy of NVC as revealed in the present study as well as in the previous study undertaken by the authors, however, would need to be confirmed and substantiated with other researches in the field with more concrete designs and appropriate measures. A limitation of the study could well be its time-consuming process of realizing the four main foundations of the model. The practice of NVC is easier said than done. It may take a lifetime to achieve the full grasp of the model needing patience and painstaking efforts to master the skills.

Moreover, EFCCP as an intervention program was designed as a group activity. During the discussions and in their feedbacks, the participants had expressed their uneasiness on certain topics to be discussed in public. Therefore, sufficient avenues are to be provided in the program for occasional individual sharing and processing in private so that the facilitators can elicit better participation from the couples and encourage them for uninhibited sharing and involvement. Further, while developing programs for communication enrichment, there is a need to take into consideration other related factors like long duration of physical separation and disparity of age, education, and social background. The present study has not ventured into these areas; these are to be explored further.

NVC trains people to gain better styles and skills of communication and dyadic interaction, correcting in the process, unhealthy styles of judging and diagnosing. This research showed a significant difference in the level of couples' communication and marital satisfaction among the participants after having participated in an intervention program, EFCCP, founded on NVC. The findings of the

study thus have opened avenues for family therapists and marriage counselors to conduct more practical and clear strategies for helping their clients to achieve fuller satisfaction and well-being in their married life using the tenets of NVC for an effective and more lasting changes, not just in behavior but also in attitudes and approaches.

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